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Painful memories of the 'spanker' – 1943

The School by Jan Steen
HERITAGE IMAGES

THE mention of a 'spanker' being used in dame schools (schools for the young, usually kept by women) of a century or so ago has aroused considerable interest.

An octogenarian correspondent, who, in her infant days sometimes "had the spanker," writes: "The spanker, which preceded the cane or willow stick, was a wonderful implement shaped like a small or domestic coal shovel, or an enlarged wooden spoon.

The usual side of the 'business portion,' rectangular or oval, was about four inches by three inches, and half an inch in thickness, with a handle of about one foot in length."

The implement 'patted' the child's open hand, the 'hurt' or 'spank' being thus distributed over a wide area, not 'stinging' a small portion of the palm as a cane or osier would.

The 'spanker' is said to have had its origin in Holland.

It is to be seen pictured in some of the old Dutch paintings, notably 'The School' by Jan Steen (1626 -79) who was known as the Moliere of painting.

In this painting, a village schoolmaster is depicted using the implement upon the hand of a weeping lad.

The interior of the Picture Playhouse in Mill Road

Mayor's regalia offered to council – 1933

THE mallet and trowel used by the Cambridge Mayor Alderman Wace at the opening of Victoria Avenue Bridge has been offered to the council.

He was the first to wear the mayoral chain presented by Colonel Harding's family and the first, certainly in recent times, to be presented with a silver cradle on the birth of a son in 1890 during his year of office.

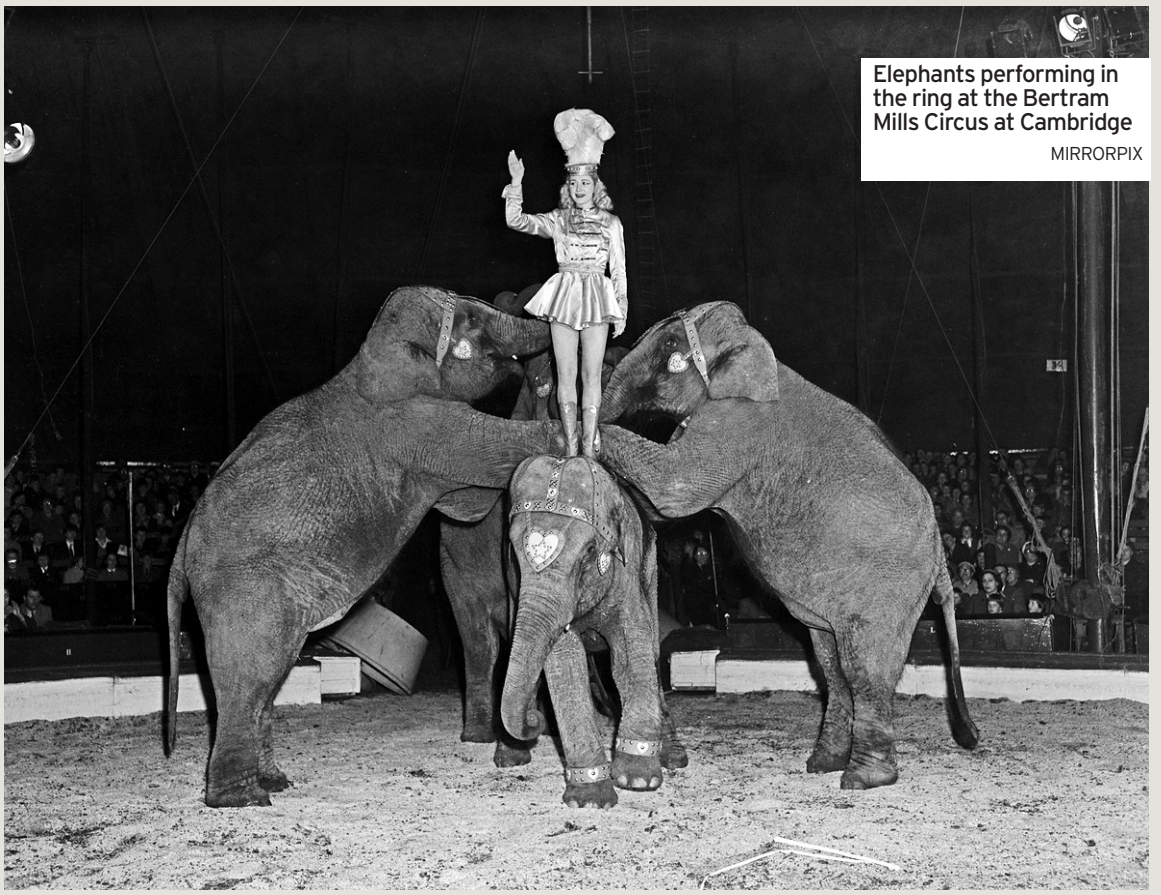
Picture Playhouse before court – 1913

MAGISTRATES heard two cases involving the new Picture Playhouse in Mill Road.

Messrs Picture and Sons, the builders, were summonsed under the Lords Day Observance Act for working there on Whit Sunday. There was no evidence and the case was dismissed.

But the manager of the Electric Light Company was fined for parking his car across the footway in Covent Garden at the back of the cinema.

He claimed it was in the entrance-yard that was filled with parking materials. He had pushed it in as far as he could and pedestrians could pass easily. He was there for 20 minutes and had moved as soon as he had been asked by a policeman.



Elephants performing in the ring at the Bertram Mills Circus at Cambridge
MIRRORPIX

A welcome for the biggest of big tops to Cambridge – 1947

AMONG the big tops, Bertram Mills' tenting-circus is surely the top. It is a circus-de-luxe.

To begin with, every one of the 3,500 seats has a back to it and you can sit in comfort.

And as the animals are the backbone of the circus let us take a look at the Bertram Mills collection.

First the horses - horses clever, horses dignified, horses graceful and all beautiful.

Less graceful, but with their own beauty of their quiet grey colour were the six performing elephants, everyone a lady – but not lady-like enough to stifle the yawn with which they sat up after lying down to "sleep" to the strains of dreamy music.

Strength was combined with grace in the Tovarisch Troupe and finally of course, there were the clowns, a merry nonsensical crew.

■ Visitors to Bertram Mills Circus this week, watching the daring acts carried out in a brilliant array of colourful costumes, might be surprised to hear that as many as a thousand costumes and uniforms are used in the show.

I had a talk with the wardrobe mistress, Miss Wilmer, and learnt that she designs them herself, cuts, fits and makes them.

Like everybody else, Bertram Mills Circus have their coupon problems – especially when costumes need replacing every year.

They have two allocations by the Board of Trade but have to account for every coupon they spend and give an account of the number of yards used in each garment.

Performing poodles at Mills Circus